

V1_6th_after_Pentecost= The Injurious Effects of Gluttony

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U.I.O.G.D.

Ave Maria!

Jesus, Mary, Joseph, we love You, save souls

O God come to our assistance. Jesus, Mary, Joseph please make haste to help us!

+++ Jesus, Mary, Joseph +++

VOL. I = THE BAD CHRISTIAN

SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

The Injurious Effects of Gluttony

“Behold they have now been with me three days, and have nothing to eat.”— St. Mark 8: 2.

How these poor people put us Christians to shame! They followed Christ everywhere, over mountain and valley, in order to hear his doctrine and preaching, so that they forgot to eat and drink; for three whole days they remained with him, in spite of the hunger they suffered, until Christ, taking pity on them, relieved them by a miracle. How do we act, who profess to be followers of Christ? How often do we not depart from him and from the teaching of his Gospel for the sake of eating and drinking? Nay, how many are there who give up his friendship and the salvation of their souls, that they may eat what is forbidden at certain times, or else gratify their gluttony by excessive eating and drinking? And why do they act thus? What is the object of their eating and drinking? Is it not that they may be happy, that they may live long and enjoy themselves? Now, the very contrary of this follows on gluttony and immoderate eating and drinking, as I shall now show.

Nothing is more injurious to one’s bodily health and wellbeing, than gluttony and an immoderate love of the pleasures of the table, for there is nothing which tends more to shorten life.

Every excess is injurious. Medicine is taken either to cure a sickness from which one is actually suffering, or to avert the danger of it. But if the medicine is not taken in the proper quantity, if, for instance, the sick person takes three spoonfuls instead of one, of what good will the medicine be then? It will only make matters worse, and will sometimes even cause death. It is the same with eating and drinking; what medicine is to the sick body, food is to him who is in good health; it maintains his strength and his life. If we never exceeded the proper quantity, nor took food too often, we should have nothing to fear. But we act in this as we do in almost everything; we use the means that God has given us to support our lives against the end for which he has given them, and we make ourselves guilty of deliberate excess. For instance, we require a certain amount of sleep in order to rest our weary limbs and to relieve ourselves from the many thoughts and cares that oppress us during the day; we require clothing in order to maintain a suitable appearance and to protect ourselves against the cold; we stand in need of days of rest and recreation in order to renew our fervor in the service of God, and to be all the better able to fulfill the

duties of our state. But the mistake is that we seldom confine ourselves to what necessity requires in those things; thus, sleep is often abused through sloth and sensuality, so that it is prolonged sometimes far into the day, and as a consequence of that the understanding is dulled, the head becomes heavy, and one is incapable of cheerfulness. Clothing is made the occasion of useless expense, pride and vanity; nay, it sometimes becomes an occasion of sin and scandal to others. The days of rest are made an excuse for squandering away one's time in idleness and useless pleasure; visits and idle talk are multiplied and prolonged, gambling and other foolish pastimes are made a daily custom, while the duties of housekeeping, the care of children and the most important business of the soul are neglected. Thus, means that are in themselves useful and necessary, are perverted into injurious and unlawful abuses, which are contrary to the end for which God instituted those means, and that because moderation is not observed in the use of them.

So it is also with food and drink; our sensuality is not content with what merely satisfies the wants of nature; and, as the old proverb has it, it would be easy to satisfy the stomach if the eyes were not so big. If gluttony has once taken possession of a man, so that he eats and drinks to gratify his sensuality, he will hardly ever be content with merely satisfying nature; for he will either eat and drink what does not agree with him, or he will eat and drink a number of different things, or he will not observe the proper time for meals, or he will give way to greediness or to excess, and will eat more than he can digest.

It is thus that the health suffers so much and is injured instead of being preserved, while life is shortened. It is the opinion also of all medical men that most illnesses are caused by excess in eating and drinking. If a pantry in which different articles of food are stored is kept closed, it soon becomes full of worms, flies, wasps, and all kinds of vermin; so the stomach that is overloaded with different kinds of food must necessarily be filled with bad humors arising from indigestion, which lessen and destroy the natural heat of the body. Others compare the stomach to the hopper of a mill, into which the grain is poured in order to be ground; if the miller does not know his business and puts in too much at once, the corn will be ground but very imperfectly, so that it will not make good flour nor good bread. In the same way, if the stomach is overloaded with food and drink, it cannot digest properly; so that ill-health must be the consequence. A bad digestion causes evil humors in the head, and bad blood in the veins, from which nearly all diseases come. Hence the well-known saying: "Gluttony kills more than the sword."

The truth of this is proved by the experience of all ages, which shows that temperance is the best means of prolonging life: "He that is temperate shall prolong life." We know from the Sacred Scriptures that in the first ages of the world men lived to be four, five, six, seven, eight, and nine hundred years old; now what kind of food had they in those days? Bread and water: "The chief thing for man's life is water and bread and clothing" (Ecclus. 29: 28).

If I said anything of those holy servants of God who lived in the greatest austerity and mortification, and yet reached a ripe old age, you would say, as people generally do in such cases: Oh, they were Saints! Certainly they were Saints, but what if they were? Does holiness of life change human nature, and serve as food and drink? By no means. Paul, Anthony, Hilarion and many other hermits who lived in the desert, in holes and caves in the mountains, practicing the greatest austerities and mortifications, allowing themselves only a very short sleep on the bare ground, and spending all their time in prayer and meditation, were human beings the same as we are, and like us they required food and drink to sustain life; nay, many of them were of noble birth and delicate constitution, and had been brought up in luxury; and how long did they live amidst the austerities of the desert? Hilarion went into the desert when he was fifteen years old and lived to be over eighty. Anthony lived to be a hundred and twenty years old, although he entered the desert in his youth. Paul, the first hermit, spent ninety years in the desert, and was over a hundred and thirteen when he died. During all that time these holy men were always in good health, they were never in need of a physician; they never required medicine. How did they manage that? "He that is temperate shall prolong life."

On the contrary, how does it happen that so many men in the prime of life, nay, in the very bloom of

youth, are subject to catarrh, vertigo, chest-diseases, dropsy and similar complaints, from which they die prematurely? It is true that these diseases may come from other causes; but would they be so frequent if gluttony were not so common, and if food and drink were always taken in proper quantities, for the proper end, and only as far as necessity requires to sustain health? We need not puzzle much over this; what the Holy Ghost says is and must be true: "By surfeiting many have perished, but he that is temperate shall prolong life."

Are we not foolish mortals? There is nothing we desire more than bodily health; nothing that we wish more heartily for ourselves and our friends than a long and happy life, and yet we are so misled by gluttony that we do our very best to destroy our health and shorten our lives, as if death, which we naturally fear and dread, were a most welcome guest, whom we eagerly invite, and urge to hasten his steps in our direction! If we are ill, we spare neither trouble nor money; we annoy heaven with our prayers; we get others to pray; we have Masses said, and practice different devotions, for the sole purpose of being free from our illness and recovering our former health. If we are in good health, we do all we can by excessive eating and drinking, and by indulging our gluttony, to destroy our health. Could there be any greater folly or madness than this?

Gluttony destroys not only the health of the body, but also that of the soul. A life of luxurious indulgence does not lead to heaven, for there is no other way thither but the way of penance, the way of the Cross. Read the works of the Holy Fathers, and you will see what names they give to the fruits of gluttony. St. Thomas Aquinas asks if gluttony is worse than other sins, and he gives the following answer: The enormity of a vice may consist in the matter of the sin, and in that way gluttony is a small sin, because its matter is eating and drinking; or it may consist in the person who sins, and so, a rich man who commits a theft is more guilty than a poor man who commits the same theft, because the former had far less reason for stealing than the latter. In this way, too, the sin of gluttony is not great, because every one is in need of food and drink in order to sustain life. Or else it may consist in the effects which follow from the sin. In this sense the sin of gluttony is certainly a great one, because it gives rise to many different kinds of sins. In a word, it is the mother of all vices.

Why, then, one might ask, has God created so many different kinds of animals, fowls and fishes, and other articles of food in such pleasing and almost endless variety, if the enjoyment of them is so hurtful to soul and body? Would it not be better to have but one or two kinds of food, and not to have so many temptations and occasions for gluttony? We see that other animals, although they may be much larger than man, yet have generally only one kind of food; some eat nothing but grass, others nothing but a certain kind of fruit, and so on, while all, without exception, drink nothing but water. On the other hand all the elements, earth, air, and water, supply food to man. Why is that? When a king or prince invites a foreign potentate to dinner, he has his table loaded with the most costly dishes and the rarest wines; for what reason? Does he expect his guest to taste all the dishes and drink of all the different kinds of wine? No, he does not expect any such thing. His only object is to show how rich he is, and at the same time to prove how he esteems his guest, since he provides him with an abundance of food, from which he may select what is most pleasing to him. So it is also with the great King of heaven. We men are placed on earth as princes and lords, so to speak, over all unreasoning creatures; he is the great Sovereign who entertains us as his guests, and in order to show his endless glory and the great love he has for men, who are made to his image, he is pleased to prepare for them a richly furnished table, and so he has created a vast quantity of different kinds of food and drink, for our enjoyment and support, not that we should use them all to excess, but that we should take as much of them as is helpful and necessary to preserve life.

Besides, as God created a most beautiful tree whose fruit was most pleasing to the taste, in order to give our first parents, Adam and Eve, an opportunity of practicing self-denial amid obedience in Paradise, so he has also, with the greatest liberality, given us many kinds of food and drink, that we may find thereby an opportunity of practicing virtue. Thus the poor, who cannot have abundant or nutritious food, and who see the forbidden tree only from afar, as it were, have the opportunity of practicing patience

amid resignation to the divine will; the rich can practice mortification, self-denial, and charity toward the poor. Such is the intention of our heavenly Father.

Let our conclusion then be, to act according to this intention. You who are poor, remember the words of St. Paul: “But, having food and wherewith to be covered, with these we are content” (I Tim. 6: 8). No matter how poor you are, you must thank God that he has freed you from many temptations to gluttony and from the evils that follow that vice both for soul and body, and you must console yourselves with the promise of Jesus Christ: “Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice, for they shall have their fill” (St. Matthew 5: 6); you will be filled with the eternal joys of heaven. You, who are rich and wealthy, never forget the advice of St. Peter: “Be sober and watch; because your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about, seeking whom he may devour.” Never allow yourselves to be misled by gluttony. Help Jesus Christ in his poor out of your abundance, so that they may one day receive you into eternal tabernacles. Amen.

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